

What Are Catholics Free to Believe or Not to Believe?

(Rev. H. G. Hughes in Ave Maria.)
 One of the most fruitful sources of misconception in regard to the Catholic religion is the general ignorance prevalent among those outside the Church as to the true meaning of what we call "devotional practices" and their place in the religious system of which they form a part. Our good non-Catholic friends observe us devoutly "telling our beads," kneeling in prayer at this or that shrine, wearing scapulars and medals, reciting certain prayers in honor of the saints, taking holy water, receiving blessed ashes, candles or palms, and they are apt to conclude that all these things stand upon the same level as the reception of the sacraments or the observance of the moral law and the commandments of the Church. Not knowing the distinction between essentials and non-essentials, they class together all the practices which they observe to be in use amongst Catholics, and think that they are all equally binding upon us. Finding some of these practices very distasteful to them, failing to see any signification or usefulness in others, they deem that they could never bring themselves to embrace them even for the sake of that peace and certainty of faith which they often instinctively feel is not to be found elsewhere than in the Catholic Church.

Certain observances, as we have seen, are made obligatory by the Church upon all Catholics; some because, as in the case of the sacraments, they are the regular and appointed channels by which the life of divine grace flows through the whole body; others because they are of peculiar and universal efficacy in insuring a practical Christian life. But beyond these there is the very large class of practices which go under the general name of "Catholic devotions." Not essentially necessary to the spiritual life of a Catholic, as are the sacraments, nor of such universal efficacy in the promotion of the essentials of a practical Catholic life as are the precepts of the Church, they are, nevertheless, of greater or lesser utility as helps to true devotion.

Men's souls have many needs in common, yet each particular soul or class of souls has its own special needs. Catholic devotions are intended to meet these needs, both common and individual. Thus that we find in the Church so great a variety of devotional practices, some of a more or less universal character, co-extensive almost with the Church itself, as satisfying wants which are felt by all or by the greater part of the faithful; while others are of less extension as appealing to certain souls only.

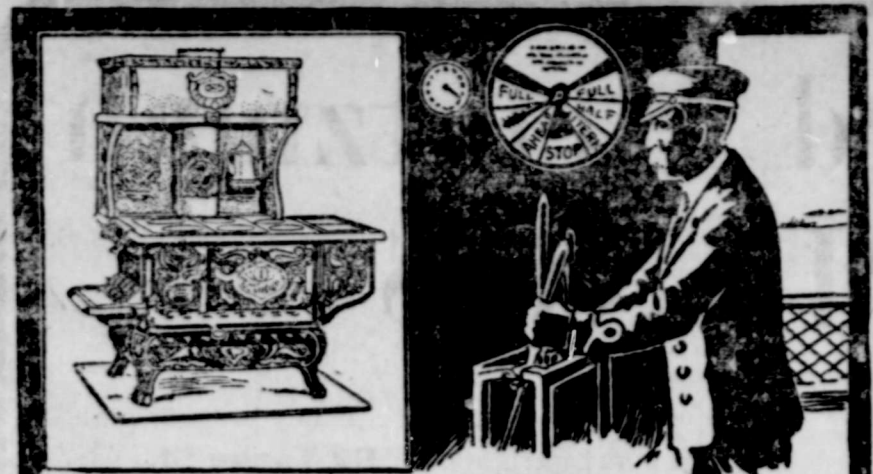
The attitude of the Church herself toward these devotional practices is somewhat different from her attitude in matters of faith. Of both she is, of course, the supreme judge, but, in the nature of things, her judgments in doctrinal matters must more often be strict and peremptory than in the matter of devotions. While it is true that not only will false doctrine produce wrong practice, but wrong practice will also frequently result in damage to faith; yet the boundaries within which varieties in practice may move without damage to faith are wider than those limits beyond which opinion matters of doctrine passes into error.

The Church, therefore, is very tolerant in regard to practices of devotion. The moment, indeed, that they involve or imply a false conception of the teachings of religion she puts her ban upon them. But, with deep insight into human nature and its wants, she does not hesitate to permit many practices which are the outcome of a simple faith and affection, and are of real use to large numbers of her children, though they may draw a smile or a frown from superior and "enlightened" persons. Guided in this matter, as well as in her doctrinal teachings, by the Spirit of Truth promised to her in the beginning, she extends to such practices as pious meditation upon the truths of faith suggests to her children, now her strongest approbation or kindly toleration, according as she judges them to be of universal utility or useful for certain persons only, and according to their greater or lesser efficacy in the production of true holiness.

It should be clear, from what has been said in the present paper, that no one who submits to the Catholic Church will be called upon to take up any special form of devotion as a compulsory duty. The sacraments, Holy Mass, the commandments of the Church, will certainly be imposed upon him as conditions of membership. In all other things he will be free. Since, presumably, by the time he comes to be received into the Church he will to some extent understand and appreciate her spirit, far from feeling any difficulty in availing himself of the rich treasure of approved devotional practices which she offers to him, and which he is free to take or leave, he will thank God that he has found the religion which was made to meet every need of every soul, and he will have no hesitation in drawing from that treasury those things which he finds most helpful to the new spiritual life he will have received.

Having made his act of faith, having taken the great venture, he will find that the shadows have fled away and that the bright light of the truth of God illumines his soul. In the great brotherhood of the Catholic Church he will learn to exercise toward the devotional practices of others that respect which Christian charity, as well as the approval of the Church, demands from him, and which he, in turn, will receive from his brethren in the faith. He will see things in their due proportion, as they can be seen only from within; and he will find that his old fears and difficulties about such non-essential matters as it has been my humble endeavor to discuss in these papers were the creations of misunderstanding and prejudice alone.

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Recent Fatality at Oka Monastery

The fatality which occurred on Tuesday last at the Trappist Monastery of Oka has served once more to call to the attention of the public that remarkable institution. Unfortunately for the community, it has been recalled to the public on one or two previous occasions, as to the last case, by disasters. This is the first time, however, that the misfortunes of the monks have been attended by loss of life.

About two years ago, however, a disastrous fire broke out and swept away the work of years. When the monastery was founded, now some twelve years ago, the monks took up a tract of land generally regarded as unfit for cultivation. By dint of patience and hard work they have made it a veritable garden plot on a large scale. The community now manufactures large quantities of butter and cheese of the very best variety, and wine which has made for itself a solid place in the market. Besides, the monks raised their own flour from wheat raised on their farm, and provide for all their simple wants from the products of their farm.

Driving from the village of Oka, half of which is made up of an Indian reserve, the visitor, on his first trip to the Trappist monastery, feels as he tops the hill that he is coming to a nook in the old world. In a hollow, at a bend of the road, arise the monastery buildings with the chapel, mill and dairy and wine factory, for all the world like quiet corners in remote Germany or Switzerland.

Before reaching the monastery proper, the visitor passes the Agricultural College, conducted by the Trappists. Here is situated the guest house, where Pere Edouard, with the most exquisite courtesy dispenses the lavish hospitality of the Trappist Fathers, although abstemious where they are concerned themselves entertain their guests with the utmost liberality. The monk in charge of the hostelry or guest house is the right man in the right place for the duties of his position. Possessed of the most exquisite courtesy, he makes the most of the humble surroundings to make the visitors feel at ease and enjoy his stay.

THE AGRICULTURAL SCHOOL.

Forty-four pupils are at present in the Agricultural School. These consist for the most part of boys from the district of Montreal, although there are some from the other provinces, and even a few young Englishmen have been sent thither to learn the art of tilling the soil in the most economical and successful manner possible. During the summer months, these young men work in the fields, under the direction of the priests and lay brothers, while in winter they learn how to take care of the cattle, to make their winter sleighs and do other necessary work about the farm. Lectures are delivered in both languages on subjects of interest and use to farmers, and classes in French, English and arithmetic are conducted for the benefit of the pupils.

The monastery, which the monks had erected with so much labor, was swept away, as before mentioned, now nearly two years ago. They did not lose heart, and they now have the church of the new monastery almost completed. The coming summer will see the completion of the edifice, and its consecration by Archbishop Bruchési, for the Trappists pay as they go, and when their church is completed there will be no debt upon it.

The monastery proper has been started, but the work is progressing slowly. Brother Abel, one of the monks killed in the explosion last week, was directing the work of quarrying the stone for the new structures, and it was while preparing, as usual, the powder for blessing that he and Father Mark met their death. The quarrymen in the vicinity of Montreal are, in the habit, it is said, of grinding their own powder for this purpose in small quantities at a time. They use for the grinding wooden cylinders in their grist mill. The monks now occupy the upper stories, and one end of the wooden building erected for the butter and cheese factory and the wine factory. In this building, is situated the chapel, the chapter room and the refectory and dining-room.

One of the white-robed fathers of the institution electrified the Lenten congregations of Notre Dame a few years ago with his powerful sermons, when he was a member of a well-known teaching community. At that time he wore a full beard, and had abundant hair. To-day he is clean shaven, which is a distinctive mark of the Trappist monks.
 Another father is a veteran of the

Franco-Prussian war, who later took up his interrupted classical studies, and coming to America, entered a teaching community, becoming professor of philosophy in a well-known educational institution in New Brunswick.

Another inmate of the institution, wearing the white gown and cowl, was at one time one of the most prominent employes in the celebrated Tiffany jewelry parlors of New York.

A former inmate of the institution, Father John Mary, was at one time a member of one of the leading wholesale firms in Montreal. He has left Oka to found a new community in Lonsdale, near Providence, R.I.

The variety among the brown garbed lay brothers is as great as among the fathers.
 They filed in and each took his assigned place. The lights were lowered again, and the solemn office was intoned in a high voice by one of the fathers. That portion where the white-robed fathers remained in darkness, while they recited, each side alternately, the psalms, making up the office. Occasionally when the collect of the day was to be read, a light was turned on.

The lights in the section apportioned to the lay brothers was turned on to allow the Star artist to sketch some of the monks at their prayers. At the end of the office one of the fathers came forward and, opening the organ, accompanied the chant of the "Slave Regina," which was rendered with sublime effect by the congregation. The quaint Italian pronunciation in use at the monastery added a charm to the rendition of the sacred song, and the most casual attendant could not fail to be impressed with the simplicity and sublimity of the sights and scenes in the chapel.

The ordinary worldling cannot understand the motives which prompt men to shut themselves out from the world, but a look at the monks will convince anyone that their health has not been impaired by the regular abstemious life of the monastery, and that they appear thoroughly happy and at peace with themselves and the world at large.

A Stolen Invention

Few persons are aware of the circumstances attending the designing of the first Hansom cab, the two-wheeled vehicle introduced into the United States from Great Britain a few years ago and now seen in large numbers at all railroad depots and ferries. The designer was Charles Hansom, a Catholic, and an eminent architect. But, like so many other inventors, he was the victim of a rogue and never profited by his invention. Here is the story as told by a venerable Oblate missionary, Rev. L. C. P. Fox, in "Donahoe's Magazine" for February:

"With regard to Charles Hansom, who was a talented man in many respects other than in the exercise of his profession, he was dining on a certain day with a few friends when one of them taunted him with being unable to invent a vehicle which would supersede the old-fashioned hacks and cabs in universal use in London. Mr. Hansom got a sheet of paper, and without any delay he sketched out his idea of a safe and convenient mode of passing through the crowded streets of the great metropolis. His friends watched him while he was at work and unanimously applauded the sketch which he had drawn. They dubbed it by the name of its inventor and it was then and there called a 'Hansom Cab.' One of those present advised him to take out a patent for it, which he said he would do on the morrow. However, there was one dishonest man in the company by whom he was forestalled, for on reaching his own house that evening and being, like Mr. Hansom, a clever draughtsman, as all great architects are, he sketched out a car like the drawing he had seen and early the following morning he took it to the office and took out a patent for it in his own name, thus robbing the talented inventor of all the remuneration which he deserved to reap from it. It brought an immense but ill-gotten fortune to the one who had perpetrated the fraud, whereas Mr. Charles Hansom was never one penny the richer.

"I may conclude my notice of this eminent architect by stating that to my certain knowledge he was a good, practical Catholic. Whenever a Bishop or priest consulted him about drawing plans for a projected church he would always offer up a Holy Communion to obtain light and grace before he would commence a sketch for what he was commissioned to erect. In this respect he but imitated the example of the most eminent masters of Catholic and medieval times."

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Monsignor Falconio to Newspaper Men

Mgr. Falconio, the Apostolic Delegate, was one of the speakers at the annual dinner of the New York Press Club on February 13, at the Hotel Astor, which was attended by President Roosevelt and many distinguished public men. His Excellency received a hearty welcome from the four hundred newspaper men and their guests. His speech was voted one of the best of the evening, and his auditors evidenced their appreciation by frequent applause.

Mr. John A. Hennessy, the toastmaster, introduced Monsignor Falconio as the representative of the greatest empire of peace in the world. Mr. Hennessy remarked that he had no hesitancy in calling upon the Delegate to speak, for he knew that a Catholic clergyman was never at a loss for a message appropriate to the occasion.

"It may be very well," said Monsignor Falconio, "for Mr. Hennessy to say such things of one who is to speak in his own language."
 But speaking in a foreign tongue did not embarrass Monsignor Falconio, for, as many of the diners put it, he made "a rattling good speech" in English.
 "I beg," said the Delegate, "to return my sincerest thanks for the honor you gentlemen of the press have done me in asking me to your dinner. In honoring me you have honored our Holy Father, the Pope. Every year since I came to this country as Apostolic Delegate I have received an invitation for the Press Club dinner. Heretofore circumstances prevented my acceptance, yet I could not but appreciate your courtesy.

"Permit me, gentlemen of the press, to tender you congratulations upon the esteem in which you are held. The fact that the President of the United States is to be your honored guest to-night shows how highly appreciated is the work of the press. This appreciation is due to what is accomplished by the press, its great influence on the formation of the nation's character. No one can doubt the noble mission Divine Providence has granted to the press. That mission embraces everything relating to the life of the nation. To elevate man's condition on earth should be the constant aim of the press. But the press must not look alone to the material betterment of man. The formation of man's moral character must not be overlooked. You know well all worldly influence falls into insignificance when compared with honesty, justice and morality. When the press strives to make men worthy of their country and their religion it is surely the agent of Divine Providence. A press free and independent which is conducted on such principles as these is a blessing to a country.

"This Republic in which you live, thanks to the special favors of Divine Providence, is great, powerful and wealthy. Nowhere is liberty so true as in the United States of America. What influence you may wish to bring about this state of affairs? We can trace the country's greatness back to the Christian and civic virtues of your ancestors, their honesty of morals, their solid character, their earnest endeavor to make a land free and independent. As long as these virtues shall be your inheritance you have nothing to fear. No earthly power will be able to check the progress of the United States. But should you lack these virtues no roaring of cannon will be able to avert the country's decay. Remember that the most powerful nations that forgot their God fell. That such may not be the fate of the United States should be your earnest prayer. You must watch lest your material prosperity lead you into moral relaxation. As long as the press strives to promote morality as well as prosperity you will have nothing to fear. 'Gentlemen of the press, Divine Providence has put the pen in your hand. Make certain that you use it wisely, for the pen is mightier than the sword. It can do evil as well as good. If it does what is right God will bless you, your country will prosper and God will help you to continue your glorious mission.'

When Monsignor Falconio sat down the banquet hall rang with applause. The demonstration in his honor was a remarkable one.
 Signals of Danger.—Have you lost your appetite? Have you a coated tongue? Have you an unpleasant taste in the mouth? Does your head ache and have you dizziness? If so, your stomach is out of order and you need medicine. But you do not like medicine. He that prefers sickness to medicine must suffer, but under the circumstances the wise man would procure a box of Parmelee's Vegetable Pills and speedily get himself in health, and strive to keep so.

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